

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

105th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 104

June 17, 1997, 4:30 pm
Page S-5749 Temp. Record

FOREIGN AFFAIRS REFORM/No Broadcasting Independence

SUBJECT: Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1997 . . . S. 903. Feingold/Harkin/Wyden amendment No. 395.

ACTION: AMENDMENT REJECTED, 21-74

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 903, the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1997, will reorganize and consolidate the foreign affairs agencies of the United States Government. Arrearages of \$819 million to the United Nations will be paid over 3 years subject to certain conditions. The bill will authorize \$6.08 billion in fiscal year (FY) 1998 and \$5.93 billion in FY 1999 for the State Department and other foreign affairs agencies, including the Peace Corps.

The Feingold/Harkin/Wyden amendment would put the Broadcasting Board of Governors and the Director of the International Broadcasting Bureau under the control of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy. (The post of Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy will be created by this bill. The Under Secretary will have authority over most of the functions of the USIA, which will be abolished. The Broadcasting Board of Governors and the Director of the International Broadcasting Bureau will remain independent of the State Department. They will have control over the United States' broadcasting services--the Voice of America (VOA; the VOA broadcasts information on the United States in more than 50 languages), WORLDNET TV, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty (RFE/RL; these stations broadcast information on domestic and regional events in Europe to the European countries that they serve), Radio Free Asia, and Radio and TV Marti. Current management restrictions on the operation of the broadcast services, including spending caps, will be retained. The members of the Board will be subject to Senate confirmation. The Director will serve at the pleasure of the President and will be subject to Senate confirmation. The Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy will serve on the Board. The State Department Inspector General will have full oversight authority over the broadcasting services (subsequent to the vote, an amendment was adopted by voice vote to create an independent inspector general office to oversee the services).)

Those favoring the amendment contended:

Setting the United States broadcasting services loose again after they have been restrained for only 3 years will lead to a

(See other side)

YEAS (21)		NAYS (74)			NOT VOTING (5)	
Republicans (0 or 0%)	Democrats (21 or 49%)	Republicans (52 or 100%)	Democrats (22 or 51%)	Republicans (3)	Democrats (2)	
	Baucus	Abraham	Helms	Akaka	Enzi ⁻²	Daschle ⁻⁴
	Bingaman	Allard	Hutchinson	Biden	Kempthorne ⁻²	Johnson ⁻⁴
	Boxer	Ashcroft	Hutchison	Breaux	Roberts ⁻²	
	Bryan	Bennett	Inhofe	Byrd		
	Bumpers	Bond	Jeffords	Cleland		
	Conrad	Brownback	Kyl	Dodd		
	Dorgan	Burns	Lott	Durbin		
	Feingold	Campbell	Lugar	Feinstein		
	Harkin	Chafee	Mack	Ford		
	Kennedy	Coats	McCain	Glenn		
	Kerrey	Cochran	McConnell	Graham		
	Kerry	Collins	Murkowski	Hollings		
	Kohl	Coverdell	Nickles	Inouye		
	Leahy	Craig	Roth	Landrieu		
	Moseley-Braun	D'Amato	Santorum	Lautenberg		
	Reed	DeWine	Sessions	Levin		
	Reid	Domenici	Shelby	Lieberman		
	Rockefeller	Faircloth	Smith, Bob	Mikulski		
	Sarbanes	Frist	Smith, Gordon	Moynihan		
	Wellstone	Gorton	Snowe	Murray		
	Wyden	Gramm	Specter	Robb		
		Grams	Stevens	Torricelli		
		Grassley	Thomas			
		Gregg	Thompson			
		Hagel	Thurmond			
		Hatch	Warner			

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE

1—Official Business
2—Necessarily Absent
3—Illness
4—Other

SYMBOLS:
AY—Announced Yea
AN—Announced Nay
PY—Paired Yea
PN—Paired Nay

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resumption of their wasteful spending practices and will make it much more difficult to privatize them as planned in 2000. The independent structure that this bill proposes for the services is nearly identical to the structure that existed for RFE/RL from the 1950s until 1994. In 1994, after decades of General Accounting Office audits had accumulated that documented scandalous abuses, steps were finally taken to stop wasteful spending. Before those steps were taken, RFE/RL paid some of its staff members salaries of \$200,000 to \$300,000 and gave them perks that would never be allowed in Federal agencies. Fully 25 percent of its budget went to administrative costs, compared to only 12 percent for the VOA, which was under the State Department's control. Basically, those services were given money and told to spend it as they wished, and a lot of it was then wasted. Even if none of the abuses resurfaced, allowing the broadcasting services to be independent will be wasteful because it will require the creation of a whole new government agency. Instead of sharing resources in common with the State Department, such as legal, accounting, and personnel departments, it will need to act independently. This fact will eventually make it much harder to privatize the broadcast services as planned. The primary goal of any organization, regardless of its purpose, is to survive, and the principal tendency of any organization is to grow. As soon as these services are independent they will start hiring staff and sending lobbyists to Capitol Hill to justify their existence and to ask for more money. They will resist being privatized. Frankly, we would prefer to privatize them immediately. The United States should not be in the business of running press outlets. Listeners know that it is paid for by the United States and believe it is just propaganda. Further, any use that it may have had as an alternative to no news or misinformation in totalitarian countries has been greatly diminished by new forms of communication that are readily available around the world, including the internet and CNN. The U.S. broadcasting services are Cold War relics that have outlived any usefulness they may ever have had. We should not breathe new life, and wastefulness, into them by granting them independent status. We therefore strongly support the Feingold amendment, which would put them all under the direct control of the State Department.

Those opposing the amendment contended:

When the USIA is consolidated into the State Department, the broadcasting services will be held back in order to preserve their independence from the U.S. Government. Those services (except for the Voice of America) do not have their content dictated by Federal Government employees. Our colleagues contend that because the services are paid for by the Government, the world listeners assume that they are controlled by the Government. Fifty years of experience prove our colleagues wrong. For decades people behind the Iron Curtain turned to RFE/RL as their only source of honest information on what was happening in their countries. They did not believe, and they were right not to believe, that the programming content was decided by the United States Government. Those broadcasts nurtured and sustained them in the dark days of communist totalitarianism, and played no small part in crushing the Soviet empire. Radio Free Asia and the other radios play a similar role today. Currently, Radio Free Asia is broadcasting the memoirs of a Chinese dissident; no official U.S. radio could air such programming because of the diplomatic repercussions. Radio Free Asia can have such programming without hurting diplomatic relations because China knows that the United States Government does not have any editorial control over the programming.

Our colleagues have offered the Feingold amendment to take away the broadcasting services' independence. Their amendment would put the services under the direct control of the State Department. They have given two basic rationales for their amendment. First, the claim has been made that having the United States' broadcasting services remain independent of the State Department will result in wasteful spending. This claim is false, because all of the controls on wasteful spending by the services that were enacted in 1994 will be retained, plus new controls will be put in place. We admit that in prior decades these very effective radio stations were also very wasteful because no management oversight was exercised. However, that fact has changed. United States broadcasting services are now both effective and efficient. Under this bill, the State Department Inspector General will have full oversight authority (NOTE: a subsequent Feingold amendment was adopted by voice vote that created an independent inspector general to oversee the broadcasting services), spending caps will be retained, the Director of the International Broadcasting Bureau will serve at the pleasure of the President rather than the Broadcasting Board, and the members of the Broadcasting Board as well as the Director will be subject to Senate confirmation. It simply will not be possible to return to the days of wasteful spending. Our colleagues then object that even if wasteful spending does not resume, simply having two organizations instead of one will result in an inefficient use of resources. They say that the radios will need their own legal, personnel, accounting, and other departments instead of relying on State Department resources. This argument would be reasonable except for two facts. First, the broadcasting services already budget for all of those functions. Second, to the extent that they share resources with other USIA functions that will be merged into the State Department, they will still be able to share those resources under the Economy Act even though they are independent. No one new will be hired; no new duties will be assumed. Operations will not change. The only effect of not merging them will be to keep their programming independent of State Department control.

The second reason our colleagues give for taking away the broadcasting services' independence is that they fear that if they stay independent they will try to extend their Government funding past 2000 (in 1994, Congress passed a sense-of-the-Congress statement that Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty should be privatized in 2000; that statement was based on the assumption that European nations would be stable democracies by that date, no longer threatened by communist and other totalitarian forces, and thus no longer in need of an independent source of news; no statement has been passed in favor of privatizing the other broadcast services). We

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believe that this reason is really the main concern of our colleagues. They simply disagree with any broadcasting paid for by the United States Government. On this point we just have a difference of opinion. We believe the testimony of dissidents from around the world, many of whom were instrumental in toppling oppressive regimes, on the value of United States broadcasting. Our colleagues believe their theory that it is wasteful spending that listeners distrust because it is funded by the United States. Even if we agreed with our colleagues, though, we would not agree that the best way to make sure that the services were privatized would be to bury them inside the State Department. If they are independent and their members are subject to Senate confirmation they will get much more scrutiny. We are not necessarily in favor of privatizing RFE/RL because the situation in Europe is not yet stable. If we end up opposing privatization in 2000, we are going to have a harder time defending our position if those radios are independent.

In summary, the expressed concern of our colleagues that allowing the broadcast services to remain independent will result in wasteful spending is unwarranted. The concern that it will make privatization of RFE/RL less likely not only is wrong, but exactly the opposite is true; it will make privatization more likely. If our colleagues succeed in their effort, the State Department will then bear direct responsibility for the programming, and the value of that programming as an independent source of news will be lost. Broadcasts will be weighed against other diplomatic interests, and censorship may result. We strongly oppose that result, and thus urge the rejection of the Feingold amendment.